

CAPITOL STUFF

By JERRY GREENE

Washington, July 10—A significant chunk of the missing ingredients in the Vietnam war review laid out in the top secret Pentagon papers surfaced today from a dusty corner of an office bookshelf.

The private, candid views of the key principals involved, about the actions they had taken and were contemplating in the critical 1965-68 period are all there in their own words—Lyndon Johnson, Dean Rusk, Robert McNamara, McGeorge and Bill Bundy, George Ball and Walt Rostow—take your pick.

LBJ is found musing in June 1965: "what will be enough and not too much? . . . I know the other side is winning; so they do, too. . . . I'm never bothered about a decision I know is right. When I land troops they call me an interventionist, and if I do nothing I'll be impeached. . . ."

All this, and much more, some of it too earthy for printing in a family newspaper, is laid down with gusto in a little book entitled "The Tuesday Cabinet," published last November by Prentice Hall and almost totally ignored around the capital. It was written by Henry F. Graff, chairman of Columbia University's history department, a noted historian who was given an unprecedented view of presidential decision making from the inside, at the time it was being made.

Graff, uncensored by the administration, wrote two long newspaper articles back in 1965 and 1966, telling of his findings, but these apparently had been forgotten, and his book widely dismissed as an LBJ apologia when it appeared. It is no such animal, and today with Johnson maintaining stony silence in the face of harsh criticism and charges of duplicity if not worse stemming from the Pentagon papers, the book assumes new importance.

The authors of the review of American involvement in Vietnam, in what has come to be known as the Pentagon papers, stressed that they worked solely from documents, mostly Defense Department files, that they were permitted no interviews, no access to White House archives. This is where Graff fills at least some of the gaps.

Members of the LBJ staff were responsible for an invitation for this outside historian to conduct an extended, on-the-spot, on-time running survey of the White House inner circle at work on the war.

Graff coined the name Tuesday Cabinet; it consisted of the intimate presidential advisers asked to lunch each Tuesday for a war conference. The historian was given free range to interview the President and all of the advisers at what he calls "four critical moments in the history of the Vietnam war." He could write what he pleased, then or later.

The historian's view: "Anyone who wants to weigh the reasons for American participation in the war or to make concrete the abstraction called presidential leadership, dare not overlook those weekly luncheon meetings. There, the key men of the republic proposed, analyzed and argued about the policies that were to be

associated forever with the name of the chief . . . there they shared their hesitations and anxieties, discussed and often impugned the motives of their domestic opponents, shaped the administration's verbal defenses, and searched for the historical precedents to rely on for comfort and support."

In the countless words published from and about the Pentagon papers during the last month, large emphasis has been laid upon a supposed "consensus" in the administration in September 1964 for bombing North Vietnam after the November presidential election.

William Bundy's Answer

LBJ, by inference, has been given the image of a politician planning attack while preaching peaceful intentions in his campaign oratory.

It develops in the Graff book that this was the prime question the historian had for members of the Tuesday Cabinet when he went to work in June 1965. He asked all around the place, first of William Bundy, then assistant secretary of state for Far Eastern affairs:

"Was the decision to bomb targets north of the 17th Parallel restrained until after the 1964 presidential campaign was over? Bundy's answer was categorical: There was no relationship between the two events. Although the White House had long recognized that bombing might be deemed necessary, he said, the President's resolve had been to keep looking for a better solution."

'A Fair Target for Historians'

McGeorge Bundy, the national security adviser, said the bombing decision "had been under discussion for about a year." He added candidly that in his opinion "there had been political considerations to take into account."

Johnson, Secretary of State Rusk and the rest of them worried deeply about Russia and China, and a larger war, and had deep concern about the requirement to maintain American commitments, to keep the nation's pledged word to other countries.

Graff saw the Johnson decisions and the Tuesday Cabinet debates as "a fair target for historians and the public at large." His book is sympathetic, but by no means entirely flattering to the subjects. And he had in an epilogue, a barbed word for some critics in Congress, Johnson and the Tuesday Cabinet, he said, "never constituted that fancied company of solons who unerringly would have confronted the tragic challenge of Vietnam with full comprehension and perfect wisdom."

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Henry F. Graff
Book has new importance